

What Date Did First Provo Settlers Arrive?

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Utah Pioneers, 1947, p. 52: "Arriving at the chosen site late in March, 1849, the colonists at once commenced the establishment of Fort Utah."

Provo, Pioneer Mormon City, compiled by Writers Program of Works Progress Administration, 1942, p. 45: "March had nearly passed before the colonists completed their plans for departure (from Salt Lake) . . . It took three days to make the trip with oxteams, a few horses, and cows." (A footnote says: "The exact date of the arrival of the settlers at Provo is not known. Peter Gottfredson, quoting from the journal of George Washington Bean, sets the date as April 1 . . . (which seems the most reliable date.)")

Bean's Journal

The above-mentioned journal of George Washington Bean, a member of the original band of settlers, was published and copyrighted in 1945 by Flora Diana Bean Horne under the title, "Autobiography of George W. Bean and His Family Records, a Utah Pioneer of 1847."

Writing of the expedition, Mr. Bean said: "There were 30 men in our party, but no families were in the group . . . (This latter bears out some other sources, including John E. Booth and Church Historical Records, that the men came first and went back for their families after getting the settlement started.)"

"On March 31 we camped 10 miles north of the river ford. My father, my brother James and I were part of the company — some of us on horseback."

"On April 1st, my 18th birthday, we moved on to within about 2½ miles of Timpanogos River (Provo R.) when we were met by a young Indian Brave on horseback dashing toward us as fast as he could ride, throwing his arms and performing all sorts of wild gesticulations. When he got within about 6 rods of our head team he jumped off his horse, threw his buffalo robe across our path and warned us not to pass that designated point . . ."

'Good Intentions'

"Dimick Huntington, our interpreter, told of all our good desires and intentions and that President (Brigham) Young, the Great Mormon Chief, had sent us, and that we would like to be 'Tco - ege - tik - a - hoo' — good friends — with the natives and do them much good if allowed to settle with them."

"The little Brave dashed off to report to the tribe, and we slowly moved on. Presently a large party met us with the War Chief at their head and we all stopped and talked the matter over again. The party seemed satisfied and we moved on and were allowed to camp on the north side of the river."

"Many had sucker fish for dinner but father and I had a fat sewed crane I killed with his rifle during the day, which was one particular event of my 18th birthday . . ."

"After looking over the country a day or two we decided to locate on the south side of the river . . ."

Young School Teacher

George W. Bean, incidentally, was the young man who lost a hand in a premature blast of the Fort Utah cannon Sept. 1, 1849. William Dayton was killed in the mishap. Mr. Bean became one of Provo's first school teachers. Later he helped colonize Sevier County.

His chronicling of April 1 as the date the settlers arrived at the banks of the Provo River would seem to have good credibility since: (1) Mr. Bean was there; (2) he kept notes on early-day happenings and related in detail the arrival; (3) he obviously was alert and well-educated for his age inasmuch as he served as an early-day school teacher here; and (4) he associated the arrival at the river with his own birthday — an 18-year-old boy wouldn't likely forget a double occasion like that.

Article in Enquirer

The date is backed up by a feature article entitled, "Pioneer Days and Indians" published in The Daily Enquirer of Provo, Nov. 27, 1894, which Dr. Colton quoted as saying:

"It was on the first day of April 1849 that those venture some pioneers . . . camped on the . . . Timpanogos or Provo River . . ." The article then related a version of the young Indian Brave's halting of the colonizers as they approached the river.

Since the anonymous writer of the Enquirer piece used the pronoun "we," Dr. Colton concluded that he likely was one of the original members of the colonization.

Commemorated as March 12, 1849; April 1 Held 'More Reliable' Date

When Did First Settlers of Provo Actually Arrive?

By N. LAVERL CHRISTENSEN
March 12, 1849, traditionally is commemorated as Provo's "birthday."

But is that really the date when the first colony of Mormon settlers arrived?

The writer doesn't think so. From our examination of evidence available, we believe the settlers reached the banks of the Provo River some 20 days later.

We are not one to debunk history, nor to discredit the writings of good men and women who have gone before. But in this case, arrival dates suggested by various historians range

from "early in March" to April 1, 1849. Some of these have to be wrong. Who is right?

There is an autobiography of a charter member of the original Provo group which sets forth April 1 as the date of arrival, and the statement of a second pioneer to back up the contention. Minutes in the LDS Church Historical Record show that it wasn't until March 17

that the roster for the Provo colonization was complete. It would have required some time to get ready for the three day trip.

Let's have a look at a number of the histories, keeping in

mind that (1) information shedding light on the subject has been made available since some of these were written; and (2) historians with a wide range of material to cover, may not in every case have had time for an exhaustive tracking down of a single elusive fact . . . Like the date this valley was settled. In deed at the time, it may not have seemed that important.

Most of the following sources have been checked personally by this writer. Others are quoted from a historical study of "Exploration of Fort Utah" by Ray C. Colton, 1946, written for

a master's thesis at Brigham Young University. (Dr. Colton is now with the faculty of the LDS Institute at University of Utah.)

E. W. Tullidge, History of Provo, Tullidge Quarterly Magazine, July 1884, p. 233: "Early in March 1849 the first colony sent south of Great Salt Lake County set out under John S. Higbee to found Provo City."

Orson F. Whitney, History of Utah, Vol. 1, 1892, p. 399: "John S. Higbee . . . at the head of about 30 families . . . set out from Salt Lake City early in March 1849 to found a settlement on Provo River."

Utah east of the Geneva Road

J. Marinus Jensen, History of Provo, 1924, p. 33: "After three days' travel, they (the Mormon settlers) arrived at Provo River about March 12, 1849."

Andrew L. Neff, History of Utah, 1940, p. 151: "Three days it had taken the colonists to reach their destination with their provisions, seed, implements of husbandry, and livestock, so it was approximately March 12, 1849, when the new center began its existence."

(Note: The date March 12, 1849, is inscribed on the monument near the first site of Fort Utah east of the Geneva Road

some 40 rods north of Center Street, dedicated by the Daughters of Utah Pioneers Aug. 30, 1937; also on a monument at North Park dated July 24, 1941, by the Sons and Daughters of Utah Pioneers.)

John E. Booth, "History of Provo Fourth Ward", "It was not until the latter part of March, A. D. 1849 that any settlement for the cultivation of the soil and the making of permanent homes was attempted on Provo River."

Memories That Live, a Centennial History of Utah County published by the Daughters of (See WHAT DATE, Page 7)